Transportation–Community Linkages

Community Input

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Parking Improvements

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Map

No. 9 - Existing Infrastructure

Community Input

As a member of the consultant team, Carter & Burgess assessed conditions on the HemisFair site, related to access, traffic, parking, transit, and pedestrian linkage issues associated with the proposed street, parking, walkway and transit service improvements. Available information, such as the Downtown Parking Demand Study and traffic volume data, was used to identify existing conditions.

Pedestrian way

The Conceptual Plan *(see pg. 45)* identifies the general location and relationship of existing and proposed uses in the park and surrounding area. Transportation facilities shown on the Conceptual Plan include the following proposed concepts and improvements:

Streets and driveways
Parking
Pedestrian gateways and movement corridors
Tram Service
Regional Visitor Information Center *(see pg. 41)*
Thompson Transit Facility

Existing Infrastructure

Vehicular Access

The existing roadway network serving the HemisFair Park area consists of an Interstate Highway and city streets. Beginning on the northeast corner of the site, along the eastern side of the park, IH-37 runs north-south between the two east-west direction exits on either side of the park - Market Street (one-way eastbound, undivided four-lane with parallel parking on north side of street) to the north, and Durango Boulevard (two-way, median divided four-lane with parallel parking on both sides of street) to the south.

On the portion just south of Market Street, running parallel to IH-37 on the eastern side of the site is Bowie Street, which serves as a frontage road, along a two-way, undivided four lane path, from north to south, until the first driveway opening. It then becomes a one-way access running south, merging with IH-37 exit traffic, up to the traffic signal at Durango Boulevard.

On Durango Boulevard, there are several curb cuts along the north side of the street accessing parking areas that serve the current Park uses; one of the curb cuts corresponds to the only street opening and signal light (Indianola Street) on the south side of Durango Boulevard. A curb cut and signal is currently planned along the south side of Durango Boulevard at Labor Street, to accommodate the new traffic patterns of the 36 acre San Antonio Housing Authority redevelopment at the southwest corner of IH-37 and Durango Boulevard.

To the west of the site is S. Alamo Street, a two-way, divided four lane roadway with limited vehicular access to the HemisFair site - one curb cut at the parking area just north of Durango Boulevard, and two additional cuts - one that serves the Convention Center loading docks and another at the northwest corner of the HemisFair site, which serves as a limited access, drop-off area for Convention Center patrons.

East end of site @ IH-37

Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access to the HemisFair site consists of the primary west entrance along S. Alamo Street, marked by the "HemisFair arch" at the end of HemisFair Plaza Way. Additional pedestrian access to the site occurs at many other places along the perimeter of the site, primarily along Durango Boulevard sites, or through the parking lot along S. Alamo Street [that currently serves as limited parking for the All-Around Playground], however, none is clearly marked as such, and is generally found through exploratory means. An entrance to the Park is also found at the River level, through the Convention Center up to Plaza de Mexico. This plaza is surrounded by the Instituto de México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM) and the Convention Center and provides limited visibility to the adjacent park areas.

HemisFair Park Way, looking east

Proposed Infrastructure/Linkages

Adjacent Neighborhood Plan Recommended Improvements:

Transportation improvements identified in the Downtown Neighborhood Plan and Downtown Transportation Plan, with regard to the HemisFair Park site, include the following:

- Improve the Durango Boulevard interchange to provide direct access to the area west of downtown
- Market Street Realignment - reduce curve as Market Street approaches IH-37/ Alamodome and incorporate Bowie Street, south of Market Street, to allow for Convention Center expansion.
- Alamo Street and/or Broadway Bicycle Corridor - Witte Museum to S. St. Mary's Street connection to the Mission Trail.
- Old Mission Trail Re-development

Access and Circulation

On-site Parking

Due to the limited open space, on site parking must be strategically located and limited to maximize open space. Reducing the amount of surface parking area and parking structures that minimize the impact to open space, are highly desirable.

Off-site Parking/Transit

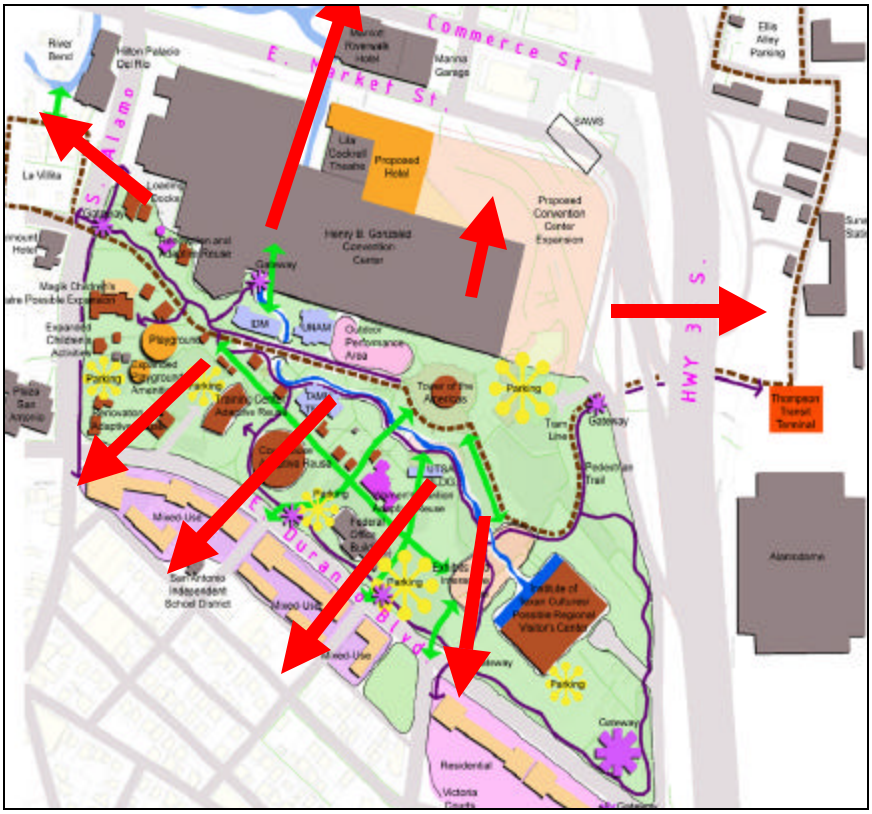
Shuttle service is an option for providing access to underused parking areas east of IH-37. Existing infrastructure includes the Thompson Transit Facility and surface lots, which are currently underutilized. These lots could serve as remote parking areas if a shuttle service were implemented. This service could be realized through the use of trams, buses or a historic rail trolley.

Transit Buses

VIA Metropolitan Transit buses and rubber-tired trolleys could be used for shuttle bus service between HemisFair Park and offsite parking. Buses would operate on the existing street network, requiring more routes and increased service, with increased capital and operating costs. The nearest potential bus stop to the Tower plaza area would require walking several hundred feet to the base of the Tower. VIA's existing trolleys are no longer in production and other vehicle types would have to be considered. Delays might be experienced because of congestion during peak traffic periods.

Existing trolley

Linkages Concept Plan



Trams

Trams are open-sided, rubber tire trains consisting of a power unit and trailer, similar to parking lot trams used at theme parks and other major recreation areas. The tram option is functionally similar to offsite parking with shuttle bus service.

The proposed tram route, shown as a dashed brown line on the Concept Plan map *(see pg. 45)*, maintains an average operating speed of five-ten miles/hour. The distance between a potential Ellis Alley loading zone and the La Villita turnaround is approximately 1.5 miles., with a one-way travel time of approximately 15-20 minutes or 30-40 minutes roundtrip. With two trams in operation, the service could provide headways of 20 minutes between trams scheduled with a 40 minute roundtrip to allow for loading and unloading of passengers along the route.

Tram opportunity model

Some minor improvements to the existing infrastructure would be required for trams to safely cross S. Alamo Street and Bowie Street. Intersections where pedestrian walkways cross the tram route should be controlled by signs and pavement markings, warning pedestrians of an approaching tram. Traffic signal preemption or cycle adjustments for tram passage may be needed at street intersections. The open-sided tram vehicles could operate on city streets, but could not be safely operated

on a highway. Use of the existing walkway under IH-37 would be feasible.

Pedestrian walkway under Clocktower

Existing paved walkways will be examined to verify structural capacity to carry additional tram weight. On travel paths where a tram would share existing paved Park walkways, the effective width of the pedestrian walkway would be reduced to accommodate the tram roadway. The route should be clearly marked on the pavement with tram stops marked every 1,000 feet at a maximum.

Other considerations presented by the proposed tram and offsite parking include public information, enforcement, and security. Although the HemisFair Park area is served by public transit, most visitors arrive by automobile or walking. The tram would serve park visitors, tourists, and Convention Center and Alamodome patrons. Visitors would need clear direction to use the off-site parking and to prevent spillover parking in adjacent neighborhood areas instead of using the remote parking and tram.

The tram proposal may be considered a short term solution. It requires relatively low initial capital, but would represent a significant operating expense. Tram service could be implemented in a short period of time. At a later date, if a demand is established, a more sophisticated, but perhaps more capital intensive system could be considered.

Historic Trolley

The 1999 Downtown Neighborhood Plan and 1997 Downtown Transportation Plan envisioned a steel-rail historic streetcar extending through the HemisFair park area and potentially extending to other areas in Downtown and to Brackenridge Park. A historic trolley line could be developed linking La Villita, Convention Center, HemisFair Park, Thompson Transit Center, St. Paul Square, and the Ellis Alley Park and Ride site. The historic trolley would provide needed transit service between these destinations and would be a visitor attraction, enhancing the downtown visitor experience.

Development of a historic trolley line could be eligible for federal assistance under the New Starts program of the Federal Transit Administration. The trolley line could be integrated with a future Light Rail network, if implemented.

Parking Analysis

The existing parking supply on the HemisFair Park area site, includes approximately 2,000 on-site street spaces, and approximately 6,000 spaces in remote parking facilities.

Due to the impending relocation of the Federal Courthouse and Training Center, development of new park uses and attractions and other changes are expected to alter existing parking demands and utilization patterns of park visitors. The ability to relocate some of the current office uses such as the Park Police would also increase the number of parking spaces currently available on site, although these demands will be replaced by new uses occupying the buildings.

Parking Improvements

Parking should be strategically located and limited to maximize open space. In an effort to unify the entire HemisFair site through open space, the current asphalt surface parking should be reduced, any onsite parking should be relocated to the periphery of the park and multi-level parking garages that minimize impact to open space should be encouraged, to provide improved aesthetics throughout the park.

New parking structure opportunities

Three new parking garages are proposed in the Master Plan. The total number of parking spaces provided in these three facilities would exceed the capacity of existing on-site parking facilities. The three new structures should be designed so that the ground level façade is pedestrian scaled, and landscaped to enhance the immediate environs of both street and park experience. An option to depress, below grade, part of the lower structure level provides an opportunity to use landscaping techniques to conceal part of the facade.

One new, two-level parking deck with approximately 350 spaces is proposed on the east side of the existing Federal Administration Building to serve office uses and the Institute of Texan Cultures. Limited surface parking should be considered near the southeast corner of the Park site, near the Institute of Texan Cultures, to serve drop off and short-term parking needs for both the ITC and a proposed Regional Visitor Information Center. Any existing surface parking areas that are currently used by tenant personnel and/or delivery vehicles should remain on the site in limited quantity.
A new four level (750-1000 spaces) parking structure is proposed on the northeastern side of the park to serve the Tower of the Americas and Convention Center patrons. This new parking facility to be located near the Tower of the Americas and the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center is proposed to be a recessed structure, with considerable landscaping, such as hanging gardens at each level.

The surface parking area in the Alamo Street Plan area, adjacent to the Adrian Spears Training Center offers a unique opportunity to incorporate an underground parking structure. At this location, an additional underground parking garage could potentially be developed at the site of the existing Park Police surface lot, if financially feasible. By eliminating at-grade parking, an open space connection between the children's playground and the Tower of the Americas and North Boulevard Plan areas provides a solution to increase open space throughout the entire Park.

The existing surface parking on the south side of Durango Boulevard is envisioned as future development of predominately residential use. Future parking that will serve uses on the south side of Durango Boulevard should be developed as an integral part of any structure. If the underground garage at the site of the existing Park Police surface lot is not feasible, then adequate parking should be incorporated to serve the parking needs of the Alamo Street area and the needs of the development along the south side of Durango.

Event Spillover Parking

During special downtown or Alamodome events, a decal parking program currently exists along the northern streets of the adjacent Lavaca neighborhood. This program eliminates street parking , during special events, along any of the northern neighborhood streets, with the exception of residents, who are allowed to park on the street, by displaying the appropriate decal. At the same time, the Indianola Street entrance to the neighborhood along Durango Boulevard is closed off to through traffic. Similarly, it is recommended that all existing or future (e.g., Labor Street, etc.) access points along the south side of Durango Boulevard should be closed off to through traffic during special events.

City's wayfinding location board

Pedestrian Improvements

The success of the HemisFair site will significantly rely on the ability to link major facilities, activity areas, and uses, as well as parking facilities. Major pedestrian gateways would be located around the park perimeter. The City should continue to explore with the Texas Department of Transportation and other entities the possibility of better linking the park/Convention Center to the Alamodome/St. Paul Square area for pedestrians.

Wayfinding, Signage

Main entrances to the Park should be clearly identified and provide a park identity. A consistent wayfinding system should be developed within and to the park complementing the City's planned wayfinding system. A pedestrian wayfinding system that both connects the Plan Areas within the Park and identifies the site to other downtown landmarks would create an atmosphere where residents and visitors will feel comfortable and desire visiting, rather than a place perceived as difficult to access.

Existing HemisFair signage